

Gallery to feature local bands' musical artistry

Gene Triplett • Published: February 17, 2006 •

The mission statement of Individual Artists of Oklahoma is to sustain and encourage "emerging and established artists in all media who are intellectually and aesthetically provocative or experimental in subject matter or technique.

At 8 tonight, three up-and-coming local rock 'n' roll bands get to share some of that creative sustenance and encouragement when they kick off the inaugural night of the "Art Rock at IAO concert series.

The guitar-driven intellectual and aesthetic provocations of Winter Circle, 4 Points West and Star Crash Speedway will rattle the gallery walls now displaying the off-grain textile exhibit and the paintings of Dana McBride, while threatening to send cracks through the concrete-and-color sculptures of Eric Krause.

But don't let the "art-rock tag mislead you. In pop music parlance, that phrase refers to the often-bloated, classically influenced, cathedral-organ bluster of such '70s arena acts as Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Yes and King Crimson. Not that there was anything wrong with those guys. I loved 'em all. Still do.

But that was then and this is now. Winter Circle (guitarist Andy Hale, singer Kevin Dawson, bassist Toby Prince, drummer John Megehee) drive a 21st-century brand of punk-powered pop that's careened onto the sound track of MTV's "Real World/Road Rules Challenge: Gauntlet II and been featured on XM satellite radio along with other top unsigned bands from across the country. In 2005, the group beat out a large field of locals to become the official house band of KHBZ-FM 94.7 The Buzz, and they've just completed an EP, "The Huge and Hopeful, with Grammy Award-winning engineer Eric Delegard (Bowling for Soup). And all of this within a year of getting together.

"Yeah, we sort of jump-started through a bunch of the stuff that most people have to go through, Hale said. "The major thing, obviously, was winning The Buzz house band thing.

Tonight's show was organized by the band's manager, Mark Maxey, himself a patron of the fine arts. And the "art rock misnomer attached to the show doesn't bother Hale a bit.

"I think we're all really into the visual side of things and all really like art, he said. "From small things as simple as our flier, all the way to our Web site and our CD. I'm actually a graphic designer in my other job, so I can appreciate that. But we're not exactly art rock.

Nor is 4 Points West, by any stretch. Or is it? This project of ex-Nixons guitarist/vocalist Jesse Davis with singer/guitarist Bryan Thompson, bassist Marty Shields and drummer James Wyrick has produced a six-song EP titled "Lonesome Demise of a 1st Place Prize that features brawny acoustic and electric guitar, gloriously ragged, life-worn vocals and spare percussion coming together in a beautifully ramshackle yet tuneful hybrid of roots and '90s lo-fi influences.

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A full-length album is in the works; the songs have earned airplay in Dallas, Oklahoma City and Tulsa; labels are showing interest; and Davis may be headed back to the big-time he enjoyed with the Nixons in the '90s. And he's not finicky about the "art rock term.

"We're involved locally, my wife and I. We really support the local artists, and we feel like we're a part of the scene, Davis said. "It's a brand new thing that they're doing, and we heard about it, and Mark asked us to do it, and we're like, yeah, sure.

"I thought it was kinda neat. ... I don't know, we just are what we are. We're not a jam band. It's not improvised. I mean, we orchestrate what we do. But we don't mind getting a little artsy, and we don't mind rockin' a little and we don't mind goin' down and just playing acoustics. We actually love that. And, you know, we're just very roots-based but with a lot of experimentation.

Well, that seems to fit the IAO criteria.

Meanwhile, Star Crash Speedway (guitarist Jason Velasquez, bassist Scott Norris, drummer Trace Gross, singer/guitarist Todd Moulton) wash a ton of tuneful guitar and vocal cord-flexing harmonies over their audience in a tidal wave of power-pop splendor that reminds this listener of Foo Fighters more than just a little. And Moulton wasn't offended by the comparison, nodding to Dave Grohl and company, among others, as major influences.

"Yeah, they're a huge influence, Moulton said. "They're just an amazing band, and I've never actually tried to be like any other type of band. But, yeah, that always seems to break through.

Nothing wrong with borrowing, as long as the artists whip their own flourishes through the mix, as this band does on their "Monument EP, which has drawn the interest of no less than Columbia Records.

As for the IAO show, Moulton said, "When I saw the flier for that show, I was kind of, you know, there's not a band on the lineup that would fit the kind of art-rock bill. But I guess they just got that from being an art gallery.

Conclusion: Forget the '70s pomp-rock connotations of the art-rock label. Embrace the IAO credo. And remember that most rock good or bad is just as well-intentioned a creative endeavor as the splotches and splashes that run riot across a Jackson Pollock canvas. Here's to IAO for letting rock roll in the door.

IN CONCERT

"Art Rock at IAO"

With: Winter Circle, 4 Points West, Star Crash Speedway.

Where: Individual Artists of Oklahoma gallery, 811 N Broadway.

When: 8 tonight.

Tickets: \$6 per person, all ages.

Information: 232-6060.

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